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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to dispel some of the fantasies surrounding school readiness and to look at some of the realities presented to parents and schools by children. Section I provides developmental guidelines for assessing the school readiness of 3-year-old preschoolers, examines behavior patterns normally exhibited by children on entering school, describes coping styles used by children in attempts to master the new school situation, examines areas in which regression to earlier behavior patterns commonly occurs, and reviews the roles of parents and teachers in providing support and setting expectations for a smooth adjustment into school. Section II briefly explores reactions to separation among 4- and 5-year-old children. Section III lists nine observable diagnostic signposts of school readiness in 6-year-old students, suggests ways kindergarten children can be prepared for first grade, explores ways by which teachers can make the child's experience of the first grade setting more continuous with prior school experience, and concludes that there is currently a discontinuity between the young child's capacities and the school's expectations. Reactions to the paper are presented by two child psychoanalysts. The first discussion focuses on the mother's readiness for separation. The second briefly reviews observational and projective studies of factors related to children's adjustment to school. (Author/RH)

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Arsenal Family and Children's Center
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READY OR NOT, HERE WE COME:

THE DILEMMA OF SCHOOL READINESS

by

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PREFACE

The paper Ready or Not, Here We Come: The Dilemma of School Readiness, by Nancy E. Curry and Ethel M. Tittnich, and discussed by Helen Ross and Rex Speers, is being issued as one of a series of research and development publications of the Arsenal Family and Children's Center. The Center, affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County Health Department, provides community consultative services and conducts multi-professional graduate student clinical training and agency staff in-service training in child development, in addition to providing opportunities for research by many disciplines.

The impetus for writing this paper arose from on-going concerns of the staff and the families of the Center. In the spring of 1972, some of us were busy interviewing prospective candidates for admission to our autumn three-year-group, while others were evaluating the current kindergarten children's readiness for first grade. It seemed appropriate at this time to share our ideas and experiences with other educators, parents, and colleagues in related fields. Accordingly, as part of Arsenal Family and Children's Center's celebration of the national Week of the Young Child, we presented this paper at a symposium open to teachers, colleagues in related fields, parents, and interested persons from the community. We were fortunate to have as discussants two nationally known child psychoanalysts, Helen Ross and Rex Speers.

Ethel Tittnich, Head Teacher of the three-year-group, describes the behavioral manifestations of readiness for nursery school on the part of the three-year-old and his parents. In the light of the behavioral evidence, she further discusses the teacher's responsibility for providing an environment that is ready to receive these youngsters in their initial group experience outside the family circle. Dr. Curry's presentation deals briefly with the four and five-year-old, and in more depth with the six-year-old's behavioral manifestations of readiness for first grade, as well as the schools' responsibility for being ready to receive these children. Helen Ross' discussion focusses on the parents' contributions to the child's readiness. Rex Speers sets the problem against theoretical implications of readiness for preschool with relation to the mother-child separation-individuation process.

Arsenal Family and Children's Center is pleased to make this paper available for parents, educators, and others interested in the development and education of young children.

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INTRODUCTION

Every year, parents are faced with decisions about their children's schooling for the coming fall. Parents of some three-year-olds have taken the momentous step of applying for a nursery school; now they are waiting tremulously to see if their children have been deemed acceptable to the selected school. Parents of kindergarten children are faced with the equally unnerving thought that their children may not be ready for first grade as judged by the Metropolitan Readiness Test, or by the kindergarten or first-grade teacher. And, if children are considered ready for first grade, a further concern may be the selection of a school (which in turn may or may not accept the child) to which to entrust them for the grade school years.

In the midst of this maelstrom of decision-making stands the child, on whose small shoulders is usually placed the burden of responsibility for school readiness. The dearth of quality preschools has fostered this anxiety about the child's potential unacceptability to the school. If there aren't enough places for all applying three-year-olds, it is natural that the children selected are those estimated by the school personnel to be most "ready" for school. Thus, when the young child is presented to the nursery school for his "initial visit", concerned parents begin to have doubts about their three-year-old's ability to measure up to school expectations. "Will they take her if I tell them she's not

toilet trained?" - "If he takes his blanket to school, will they think he's too immature?" - "Will they turn him down if he has one of his temper tantrums?"

The graduating kindergartener is faced with the similar indictment of potential "unreadiness" for the first grade. If he writes his numbers and/or letters backward, he is penalized on his readiness test. He may be considered unready for first grade if he is too active, can't follow directions, or cries during his visit to the new school.

But, ready or not, large numbers of three-year-olds will begin nursery school this fall, just as many six-year-olds will enter first grade. Although this influx of nursery school and grade school beginners occurs every year, little attention has been given to the feelings and fantasies engendered in these children under the impact of separation. Equally little attention has been paid to the feelings and fantasies of parents and teachers. On the adult's part, for example, may be the fantasy that school is a happy place just made for children's pleasure and that in each prospective pupil exists the ideal child who will enter school eagerly and tearlessly, begin to play happily, share cooperatively with his classmates, learn at a steady, cumulative pace and keep his desk and his clothes unsullied throughout the school day. When the child does not live up to this fantasy (and what child does?), teachers blame either the child, his parents, or both for his apparent unreadiness for school.

That the child may harbor a completely different set of expectations about school is often ignored by the adults. On the child's part, he may perceive school as being a frightening, even dangerous place, where one is abandoned because one has committed some nameless wrong and where quixotic adults present children with inexplicable demands ("Don't ask so many questions - you're here to learn!") and unfathomable standards (as evidenced in one first grade where all the little boys were forbidden outdoor recess time because they were too rowdy indoors). The fact many schools may not be ready to receive and accept children as individuals with unique needs, interests and capacities, is worthy of attention.

It is our purpose to dispel some of the fantasies surrounding school readiness and to look instead at some of the realities presented to parents and schools by children. What can the schools realistically expect of children and their parents? What should parents and children expect from the schools?

Although three years of age seems to be the acceptable age for the child to begin nursery school, until recently (Bowlby, 1973) there has been little in the literature that records, in a systematic way, the entering nursery school child's reaction to separation. However, during a five year period at the Arsenal Family and Children's Center, under the direction of Dr. Rex W. Speers, we have been looking

closely at the initial adjustment period of the three-year-old when he begins nursery school. What has emerged from this research project has been the realization that the normal three-year-old recapitulates his earlier phases of separation-individuation under the impact of the stress of school attendance. With the support of his mother during the adjustment period and with careful management on the part of the teacher, the normally developing three-year-old eventually is able to tolerate his mother's absence and to participate in the regular preschool program (Speers, et al., 1971, Speers, 1971).

Because the ability to tolerate mother's absence without undue stress for several hours daily is generally achieved by most children between the ages of three and four, and because it is becoming a cultural expectation that schooling can begin at age three, the three-year-old entering nursery school will be the first focus of this paper. A second focus will be the four and five-year-olds; but a major emphasis will be on the beginning first grader, since between ages five and six, a second critical period in the development of the child's self-image is experienced.

THE THREE YEAR OLD CHILD

A child of three, though young in years, has already accomplished many tasks and has laid the foundation for successful mastery of a variety of other life experiences such as attending school and acquiring knowledge. Since infancy he has attained body and motor competency in learning to walk, managing his body in space, and in regulating toilet activities. He has learned to talk and to use language to communicate needs and some experiences and ideas. The three-year-old has many areas in which he can be independent, such as eating, some self-care, and choice of play activities.

When a child begins school at age three he brings with him to the new situation his own individual personality and patterns of behavior. While he may evidence many abilities, he may still not be ready to take on the major challenge which school presents.

First, we will outline some of the developmental guidelines which can be used in assessing school readiness.

Second, we will examine some of the variety of behavior patterns which may normally be exhibited by children on entering school.

Third, we will present a few of the different coping styles used by children in their attempts to master this new situation.

Fourth, under the stress of beginning school most children regress to earlier patterns of behavior. We will examine some of the areas in which regression most commonly occurs.

Finally, we will review the role of the parent and teachers. How they offer support to the child, and how they set expectations can greatly influence the child's ability to make a smooth adjustment into school.

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING SCHOOL READINESS

Determination of a child's readiness for school should not be made merely on his ability to stay with baby sitters when his parents go out. School presents a variety of challenges which will test the strengths of the child. Assessment should be based on a comprehensive review of the child's developmental achievements.

Anna Freud (1965) has listed some of the guidelines to be used as an aid to assist parents and teachers in determining a child's developmental readiness for school. They are listed below:

1. On the developmental line from dependency to emotional self-reliance the child should be able to maintain a constant image of his mother even in her absence. In addition, he should be able to enter a trusting relationship with other adults.

2. On the line toward bodily independence the child should have achieved self-feeding and control of bowel and bladder.

3. On the line toward companionship a child ready for school will be able to relate to other children and to accept them as partners in their own right.

4. Finally, on the line from play to work the child should be able to use play materials in self-initiated and directed activities with minimal dependence on the adult for ideation and control.

In addition, Anna Freud mentions that the child should exhibit some affect and impulse control as well as the ability at least at some times, to wait a turn, tolerate frustration and appropriately express negative feelings.

EXPECTABLE BEHAVIOR ON ENTERING NURSERY SCHOOL

The behavior a child evidences on entrance to school will often be an intensification of the child's usual reaction to stress. A child who is shy at home when strangers come to visit will probably be shy with the new adults and children in school. For example:

> Three-year-old Brenda sat silent, hiding her head in her mother's shoulder when the teacher made a home visit. When she entered the group she clutched her mother's leg and refused to show her face from behind her mother's skirt.

Subsequent adjustment at school will depend in part on how the child mastered previous new and stressful experiences -- according to his own idiosyncratic

coping styles. Because children are individuals with separate behavioral and coping styles it would be unwise to suggest or expect that once through the doors of school all children will act the same. A mother is often perplexed when her child is not showing the same enthusiasm toward exploration of the environment another child is. On the other hand, another mother may become anxious when she considers her child's friendliness and increased activity to be bad and undesirable in the eyes of others. There are a variety of expectable behaviors which might be seen in a child beginning preschool. These behaviors are not right or wrong, good or bad, but expectable -- arising from the uniqueness of the individual and related to his previous life experiences and the current stress situation. Let me give you a few examples of three-year-olds entering nursery school:

> Tommy entered the group excitedly and hurried through every activity (puzzles, painting, blocks, etc.), so he could go on to explore the next one. Usually this child engaged in all available activities in the first half-hour of the school day, until he became more comfortable.
>
> In contrast, his younger brother, Chuckie, who began school at the same age a year later, was an active explorer but took time to observe his environment and what others were doing. He commented thoughtfully about his activity and questioned what others in the room were doing.
>
> On his first day, Denny walked slowly into the nursery group. He cast glances around the room but resisted playing until his mother told him to. He asked permission from the teacher when changing play areas and carefully watched her reaction to all his activities.

Brenda was reticent and shy upon entrance to the group. Clinging to her mother, she was hesitant, even reluctant to interact with the teacher or to use any of the play materials offered her.

Monica was also reluctant to use materials offered her, not because of her shyness in the new situation but because under stress she became resistant. Therefore, she adamantly refused initially to participate in the new situation

While valuing individual patterns, the teacher works toward modifying the intensity of such behavior so that each child can become a contributing participant in the ongoing group activity without being disruptive to the class or having to restrict his own modes of expression. During this time, from beginning school to solid group membership, there is no smooth transition Growth occurs in a spiral with a succession of upward spurts, plateaus, and regressions.

INDIVIDUAL COPING STRATEGIES

There are many strategies which children can use in helping them feel more comfortable in their experiences. Among the most common are: use of language, attempts to exert control over the environment and play materials, and the use of play activities themselves.

There are a variety of ways a child may use language as an aid to coping:

Tommy, the whirlwind little boy mentioned above, asked constant, repetitive questions of his mother and school adults, without listening to the answers. Later in his school life he channelled his questions purposefully to serve his active curiosity.

> Chuckie, Tommy's brother, also talked a great deal when he began school. However, language was an aid for him in organizing his beginning school experiences, for he used it to describe his play, reflect his successes, and to report on activities in his environment.

The ability to exert control over the environment aids a child in maintaining control over his own anxiety.

> Claire used control of materials and people in the environment as a mode of coping with the new situation. On her first day at school, she quickly took a puzzle from the shelf and competently worked it, as she directed the teacher to sit near her and work on a second puzzle.

Play activities are another avenue through which children gain mastery over their new situation. The appearance and disappearance of self and toys is a popular activity among three-year-olds.

> During her first months at school, Claire would often clutch one of the pieces in her fist and ask the teacher to guess what had happened to it. The hiding game was repeated over and over in many of the play areas with puzzles, cookie cutters in play dough, blocks and toys in sand, etc. The same little girl then hid herself and invited the teacher to play hide-and-seek with her.

Eventually the hide-and-seek game evolves into hiding and reappearing as monsters -- then hiding and running from the monsters.

Children may use activities rather than cuddly objects or other home toys as transition objects. Such activities often become ritualized and will be resumed again under similar, stressful circumstances. These may vary from nervous, excited chatter on the part of a highly verbal child, to a group's tradition of a reassuring or comforting activity. For instance:

One three-year-old group made play dough the first day the mothers left and thereafter had to begin every morning using this material until they adjusted to school. Two years later, after a traumatic event at school, the unexpected death of the school cook, fears of separation were re-evoked. On the morning school resumed, the group again asked the teacher to make play dough although this material was by now seldom used.

REGRESSION

Regardless of the level of behavioral competency and the smoothness of school entry, even the most active and sophisticated child can regress under the strain of separation and revert to earlier patterns of behavior. It is often difficult during the child's natural regressions for parents and teachers to keep sight of the tremendous growth which is taking place.

According to Anna Freud (1965), regressions may occur during all phases of normal development and in all areas of functioning; mobility and control, language development, eating, toileting and sleep. Usually the area of functioning affected is the one in which the child has most recently gained mastery, or in which the parent and child have been experiencing some struggle.

Oral regression can take the form of food refusal or excessive food consumption.

Three-year-old Monica used to take handfuls of food from the snack basket and would remain at the table until all the food had been eaten. Her greediness was in marked contrast to the other children and welled up in spite of the teacher's reassurance that there was plenty of food.

Children who generally suck their thumbs at home during quiet times, and even those who have given up the habit, can be expected to use thumbsucking at school, too -- or they may turn to use of the baby bottles available at school. Even the most competent three-year-old may have toilet accidents at school and resume bed-wetting at home in spite of having been trained for at least a year. On the other hand, the child may show anxiety or fear of using the toilet at school and even refuse to use it, or may demand extra help from the adult around physical care during toileting. Another child may use toilet accidents to express his anger at being faced with new demands.

> Three-year-old Kerry would often wet or soil himself when any limits on his behavior were set by the teachers.

In the area of sleep, many parents of three-year-olds notice that the child is totally exhausted after the school day and may either resume or more readily take naps in the afternoon which last as long as three or four hours. Other parents report that their child refuses to go to bed alone. Some three-year-olds begin to have nightmares or other disturbances in sleep habits.

Language development and usage may vary greatly among a group of three-year-olds. Regression in language can also take a variety of forms; refusal to talk, reversion to baby talk, or excessive questioning.

> Although Monica had started to talk after she was two-years-old, she had a quite sophisticated vocabulary and verbal expressiveness by age three. When she began school at three years, five months, she pointed with her hands or uttered soft grunts when asking for help from the teachers. In response to their questions or comments, she stood utterly silent.

Many a child previously graceful and skillful in performing motor feats suddenly becomes quite clumsy, tripping over nothing at all and causing all sorts of accidents to himself and objects.

> One little boy, Sean, had many such displays of clumsiness during running and walking. His regressed motor behavior during his initial adjustment resembled that of a miniature drunk.

Some three-year-old children, who previously wanted to try things for themselves in self care, now become dependent and want their parents to dress them. In addition, they may evidence inner emotional dependence and often renew lap-sitting and clinging. This last behavior is often particularly distressing to parents because they fear they will be forever tied to their children.

> Geri, at two and a half years, was considered super-competent. In fact, she was described as a toddler terror by her family. Yet, when she began school, she astounded her mother with petulant demands for constant assistance.

Although such regressive behavior is expectable on entrance to nursery school, it may not always occur at that time. The child may make a seemingly smooth adjustment only to show signs of regression after a month or two.

Even the child who has regressed, then moved forward in school, may again regress under additional strain. At home, the birth of a sibling, moving from one house to another, absence of one or both parents, or the mother's return to work, may produce a change in behavior.

> Claudia, who had previously stayed peacefully with baby sitters while her mother attended school, began nursery school at age two years, ten months. Her mother loudly stated that Claudia didn't need her. Following her mother's lead, Claudia did, indeed, settle into school. However, during the winter, following a trip out of state with her parents, she fought returning to school and cried desolately when her mother left her.

Physical illness or tiredness often leaves the child with less energy with which to maintain mastery over school attendance; in fact, it is a common phenomenon to have a rash of illnesses such as colds, stomach upsets or flu among all the children a few months after school starts. One could speculate on whether the illnesses are due to increased exposure to germs or whether they are manifestations of separation anxiety associated with beginning school.

A change in the physical setting of the school such as a room rearrangement, disorder, or leaky pipes will cause a heightened anxiety level in the group.

> The current three-year-old nursery room is in the basement with pipes extending the length of the ceiling. When these pipes unexpectedly leaked water onto the nursery room floor, the children at first showed little noticeable change in behavior; however, shortly afterwards there was a run on the baby bottles in the housekeeping area.

The entrance of new children into the group (which involves the new mother staying) often is followed by an increase in clinging, thumbsucking and conversation about mothers.

> Jerilyn, an active coper, announced her protest of the entrance of a new child by taking the pounding bench and putting it between the new mother and teacher; she would pound so loud as to interfere with conversation between the two.
>
> Claire always managed to get the new mother to assist her in some task at which she was perfectly capable.

ROLE OF THE PARENT

To assure the child a successful nursery-school experience, it is important that parent and teacher work together to understand the range of normal coping and regressive behavior, to support the child in mastery over his new experiences and to provide optimal challenge and opportunity for further growth.

Sending a child to school is often as stressful for the parents as it is for the child. While admitting the positive value of a nursery school experience, most mothers still find it difficult to share a major portion of their child's care and affection with another, usually female, adult. A mother may find herself experiencing competitve feelings. The teacher, too, often feels compelled to prove her competency at "mothering." Children may

inadvertently or purposefully contribute to these feelings by reporting to the parents that in school they are permitted to engage in an activity proscribed at home. Moreover, it is often disconcerting for parents to find that the behavior which annoys them at home is unobservable at school.

Another factor to be considered is what the school means to the child. No matter how pleasant and fun an experience it may seem to adults, the child may have his own particular fantasy about the reason he is being sent to school. For example, it is not uncommon for children who have younger siblings to feel that they are being rejected, sent out and replaced by the other child.

Parents often view the behavior of their children as a direct reflection of the adequacy of their parenting. In a group setting a mother may compare her child to the others in the group. In the examples given above, the mother of shy Brenda, tended to push her away, encouraging her to play like Lenore. On the other hand, Tommy's mother viewed his hyperactivity as bad and wanted to set premature limits.

At the time when regression is most apt to occur, parents may find themselves increasing expectations and encouraging their children to be grown-up. During those times when children need to use their particular coping

styles some parents may pressure them to given them up, because now they go to schcol.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Just as a child has had three years of personal growth prior to school entrance, he has had three years of social experiences within the context of his family. As it would be absurd to deny a child his previous developmental gains when beginning school, so it would be unwise to snatch him from the surroundings in which he has functioned during these years. Rather than becoming a substitute for home, the school should be regarded as an experience complementary to the home. A school which forbids parents beyond the gate does a disservice to the child, parents and school. It is in the context of the familiar that most learning takes place. Since the school setting itself is new and anxiety provoking, it is imperative that mothers remain to help the child adjust to the school.

No matter how competent a child may seem, his adjustment will be more stable if he has mastered school entrance with the physical support of his mother. When a mother cannot stay, the child's coping ability will usually fail at a later time, as the intellectual realization of his new situation dawns on him; then he may have increased difficulty in re-entering the group.

In addition to the mother staying, it is acceptable and common for the child to want to bring a familiar toy or beloved object from home; he uses it to help him feel more comfortable in his new surroundings. A teacher's visit to the child at home prior to the start of school also helps to make a smoother transition from the familiarity of home to the newness of school.

All the responsibility for a smooth adjustment does not rest with parent and child. The teacher and school must assume their share of the responsibility and work together with the parents in helping the child successfully master his new experiences.

While allowing for freedom and creative expression in a variety of areas, the school must provide for the physical, emotional and social safety of the child by maintaining equipment, setting appropriate limits, and creating an atmosphere for mutual liking and respect. Knowing the child will be kept physically safe and reasonably content, the parents and the child can more comfortably accept the school experience.

A child of three may need more adult interaction, may evidence more dependent behavior and less group interaction and cooperative play ability than a child six months older. By this time (three and a half), he demonstrates more initiative and group readiness and is able to participate in socio-dramatic play. In no way is it meant to imply that

this young child of three be prohibited from starting school. It requires parents and teachers to be aware of the needs of the child, to set appropriate and realistic expectations, and to plan accordingly.

SECTION II

Nancy E. Curry

THE FOUR AND FIVE YEAR OLD

Four-year-olds and five-year-olds also experience anxiety upon school entrance. Their reactions to such anxiety are consistent with their more established pattern of coping with stress. In fact, most adults can probably recall symptoms of separation anxiety and the concommitant temporary regressions (over-eating or loss of appetite, constipation or diarrhea, sleeplessness or excessive drowsiness) which recur in each new separation situation (going away to college, entering the army, a trip abroad, etc.).

As the child grows older, his maturing emotional and cognitive apparatuses supply him with a more accurate sense of time, a more efficient memory, lessening egocentricism and an intense curiosity about the widening world around him. The four and five-year-old can tolerate separations from mother, provided that she is willing to serve as the bridging agent from the safe and familiar to the new.

However, four-year-olds and five-year-olds who have never had a group experience away from home may evidence strong reactions to separation which need to be recognized in the context of a new set of developmental anxieties being encountered by the older child. At three, for example, a primary fear is that of abandonment; the four-year-old

is struggling with fears of potential loss of love as the result of his very strong feelings, which include anger, love, hate and destructiveness. Let us consider Sally's initial adjustment to nursery school:

> When Sally began in our four-year group, she stood glued to her nervous mother who explained that she, too, had had trouble starting school, as a kindergartener. Therefore, she wanted Sally to "get used to school" now, so that it wouldn't be so hard for her in kindergarten.
>
> For almost a month Sally clung to her mother and refused to enter into school activities. Meanwhile, at home, she was making incessant demands on her mother, crying at the slightest frustration, and accusing both her parents of not liking her.
>
> When her mother finally left her on her own at school, Sally cried hard for her toddler sister, Kate, rather than for her father or mother. Because she seemed stuck in her inability to play and to enjoy school, Dr. Speers talked with her; he learned that she felt she was being sent to school as punishment for being a "bad" girl. Her feelings of banishment from home were discussed with her mother who then told Sally that she was sending her to school "because I like you the way you are and because I want you to have fun and make friends."
>
> Subsequently, as Sally settled into the group as a happier, dependable and popular group member, she was able to confide in her teacher that she hated little Kate, her toddler sister, who had mother to herself at home while Sally was in school.

Thus, the technique of using the mother as the agent of familiarization did not work for four-year-old Sally, until the teacher and the mother were helped to recognize Sally's fantasy of being punished for her angry unexpressed

feelings toward her sister by being banished from home and sent to school.

SECTION III Nancy E. Curry

SIX-YEAR-OLDS

The kindergartener's readiness for first grade depends very much on the kind of educational and emotional experiences he has had during his fifth year, which is a critical period for the development of the self-image (Erikson,1963). In planning a program for a kindergarten class, one of the major goals is to maintain the children's feelings of confidence and self-esteem.

As the late preschool child draws out of his egocentrism, he begins to see things more accurately and to see himself reflected in the eyes of other people. He can now judge another child's performance and compare it to his own; a new era of self-criticism has dawned. He is especially vulnerable to disapproval and criticism from his parents and teachers.

A good kindergarten program capitalizes on the strengths of the five-year-old, while recognizing his special vulnerability to defeat and his widely fluctuating self-esteem, by offering a program in which he is free to experiment with new and old roles, new and old skills in the context of depthful play and through peer relationships.

By the end of such a kindergarten year, the competent kindergarten teacher begins to apply her diagnostic skills to determine the child's readiness for first grade. In surveying the new six-year-old's skills she can detect observable signs of readiness such as:

1. The ability to plan, execute and complete a project whether it be in art, with the blocks, in woodwork, or a dramatic play episode.

2. Increased attention focus, as evidenced by the ability to listen to a story being told, read or played on a record, being an audience to a child-executed puppet show or impromptu ballet dance, and persisting at the completion of a puzzle or simple game without being distracted by extraneous stimuli.

3. Ability to represent experiences or impressions graphically with the concommitant skill of pre-planning and executing a pictured sequence with a discernible beginning, middle and end.

4. Ability to internalize consistent adult and/or group standards, especially rules for which logical reasons have been given. This implies a degree of mastery and control over impulses so that the child does not have to immediately discharge or react to internal or external stimuli.

5. The evidence of both small and large muscle dexterity -- climbing, running, sliding, riding a bike, walking a balance board, bouncing a ball, skipping, hopping, come naturally now to the late five-year-old and early six. Small muscle development is refined to the point that the child can use a

crayon or pencil efficiently for drawing, can manipulate small pegs and plastic blocks, can pound small nails accurately with a hammer. All these large and small muscle functions are deftly subordinated to the completion of a product rather than for the process itself.

6. The ability to follow directions that have at least three separate components.

7. The ability to express oneself verbally so that the child can indicate his needs, as well as carry on a reciprocal conversation. His verbal skills further demonstrate his ability to describe a logical sequence of thought.

8. Increased sociability and the capacity for real give-and-take with other children. This includes involving oneself in depthful co-operative play and work projects as well as enjoying outings, such as afternoons spent at one another's homes.

9. The development of a sense of humor, which indicates that the child is beginning to be able to tolerate ambiguous situations rather than concentrating on the concrete aspects of a situation regardless of its ludicrous aspects.

In spite of possessing this rather awesome array of competencies, most kindergarteners, at this time of year, begin to express fears and doubts about the coming venture into first grade It is as if they are afraid to put themselves on the line and be found lacking. Recently, one kindergarten class talked about their specific fears; what seemed to emerge was the fear of the unknown -- they wouldn't know the other children, they wouldn't know the teacher and they wouldn't recognize the materials. This would fit into the concept of the late five and early six-year-old experiencing lessening egocentricism with accompanying unrealistic fears of what is expected of him by the outside world.

> For example, young Scott heard me say often to his fellow kindergarteners as they lost their first teeth, "You must be getting ready for first grade." On his first day in first grade, to his dismay he still had a mouthful of baby teeth. His mother told me that he spent the entire day wrenching at his teeth until he succeeded in pulling one and thus "being ready for first grade."

There are ways both parents and teachers can help children overcome these feelings of inadequacies. Highlighting the child's real competencies, with reference to ways these skills can be put to use in first grade, will bolster his confidence A visit, or several visits, to the new classroom and teacher can bridge the gap between the known and unknown. Practicing for first grade in kindergarten is a useful device if done in a realistic

fashion. My last kindergarten group chastised me firmly on their return to our Center after starting first grade. "It isn't anything like you said. It's horrible!" Perhaps the most one can hope is that the variety of ego-building activities and experiences provided by parents and by a good preschool program will give the child the strength to master the new experience.

Having described the sign posts of school readiness, it remains for us to question seriously whether or not our first grades are ready for our children. With the increased numbers of preschools and kindergartens, we now have children who are mature, worldly-wise veterans of another educational system which has groomed them to face the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical challenges of their continuing years in the school system.

Yet, many schools ignore the rich, experiential background of the six-year-old and nurture the fantasy of the tiny, cute, rather helpless "first grade baby." Unrealistic assumptions are made about what the first grade child cannot do, such as the assumption that he cannot take the initiative in the learning process, that he can only be motivated to read stories involving the mother/father/baby triad, that he can learn something only if it is verbally transmitted to him by an adult.

In incongruous contrast to these false assumptions, many first grade teachers have quite unrealistic expectations

of what the six-year-old should be able to do. Some of these are:

1. That six-year-olds have the capacity to sit still for long periods of time.
2. That children learn at the same rate and therefore, should be taught in groups.
3. That every child should be ready to read during first grade.
4. That six-year-olds all have to use the toilets at the same time.

It would appear that concerned parents and educators are now recognizing the discontinuity between what the six-year-old is capable of doing and what the first grades are ready to offer these quite competent, yet vulnerable youngsters. The increase in 'Alternative Schools' and 'Open Classrooms' demonstrates a renewed awareness for the need of a smoother transition from preschools where children are encouraged to be the active participants in the learning process to the more rigid grade schools.

In spite of this encouraging educational phenomenon, the majority of our six-year-olds (and unfortunately many of our threes, fours and fives) are entering schools which are not ready for them.

Let's look at several graduating kindergarteners and their first grade experiences. The first two easily met the criteria for school readiness which I mentioned early.

Scott, a curious, highly verbal and sociable six-year-old looked forward to first grade with eager anticipation. With his phenomenal memory for stories, records and family events, he was already reading meaningful words. On mathematical tasks which were part of a research program, he outshone his classmates as well as most of the children in the large experimental group. His only observable weakness was a tendency toward clumsiness in large and fine motor tasks under stress.

Scott's introduction to the first grade of an affluent suburban public school was disastrous. His teacher announced proudly to the first grade parents that her main goal for the first graders was neatness. No child's paper would be considered perfect unless it was neat as well as correct. Daily, Scott arrived home in tears as he flung at his parents his red-marked papers which were perfect, except for neatness. His unhappiness spread to his social relationships; his parents soon had on their hands a touchy, tearful six-year-old who six months before had been confident and unusually eager to try new things. His first grade was not ready for Scott.

Matthew began first grade in a local parochial school. During his preschool years he had surmounted a real aversion to change and was a confident group member in kindergarten, if somewhat shy in new situations. Matthew was given the Metropolitan Readiness exam at our school and earned a B+, only lacking one point from an A. He was given the same exam at the parochial school, in the spring prior to admission.

Two months after school began, Matthew's mother talked with me in some distress. It appeared to her that Matthew had been placed in a slow class.

We checked with the school counselor who revealed that Matthew did receive a low score on the Metropolitan given at their school and indeed had been put in the "slow" first grade. On the basis of our score, Matthew was placed in the advanced class for which he proved competent. Again, Matthew was ready for a school which had penalized his weakness without recognizing his strengths.

In contrast to these boys, let's consider a child we felt was at best only minimally ready for public school, because of his severe emotional problems.

> Although he was an excellent player, Buddie had unpredictable temper outbursts which terrified himself and his classmates. Furthermore, Buddie was almost phobic about working with letters, words and numbers, although he could easily identify any make of truck on the highway. In the local public school, allowances were made for Buddie's weaknesses; rather than being placed in the more structured first grade, he entered a transition classroom between kindergarten and first grade in which children were given time to play and freedom to explore, along with numerous reading readiness activities. This school fortunately was ready for a child like Buddie.

In conclusion, it seems important for parents and teachers to recognize that there currently exists a discontinuity between the young child's capacities and the school's expectations. All of us would do well to consider distributing the burden of readiness for school more equally and fairly among the child, his parents and especially, the schools.

DISCUSSION Helen Ross

One reason I like this paper is because it is full of reality; it deals with the facts of starting school. We must remember that the little child's fantasy about school is his reality until he has the actual experience. Some children find it hard to make the jump from their fantasy expectations to the facts of school, especially on that first day.

I have a godson of six years, who was happy about going to a "real" school. He had been to kindergarten, but now he was "ready" and started out feeling very important with his new lunch box. He refused his mother's offer to go with him down the street. He came home sodden, sobbing, utterly miserable and announced tearfully, "I am not going to school again, not tomorrow or any day." He is a determined child, and his mother saw trouble ahead. Morning came and he would not go. On that day his mother said little, but on the next day, his stand was the same. Now his mother was disturbed but held her peace until telephone calls from the principal frightened her. She called me long distance and begged for help. I replied, "Give him a little time. Let him live with the idea of school a little longer. Don't get into a contest of wills every morning. He will begin to hate school. He won't even get up in the morning if you insist too much."

That is exactly what he did. His mother continued her patience, but his father said, "There's a law that says you have to send children to school."

The mother wrote me about the sequence. Each morning, the boy grew worse in his refusal to go to school. His father threatened to drag him; his mother cried. Finally, the little boy said to her, "I think you'd better send me to reform school." He was suffering because he thought he was bad and he feared the law. His mother was willing to defy the law for a few days, so she said he could have more time, and when he was ready, it would be his own decision and she would go with him.

He regressed markedly; he lay on the floor and sucked his thumb for a good part of the day, although he was normally active outdoors. Finally, one evening, as he was going to bed, his mother said quietly, "Now, John, I think you are going to be ready tomorrow to go to school." He asked quickly, "Is it my decision?" She said, "Yes, I feel sure it is your decision. I have watched you these last days, and I think you really want to go to school, and I will take you tomorrow." She was thus offering her ego strength to bolster his. The next morning, he got up of his own volition, dressed himself and went to school. Later, he returned, happy with his friends.

Why do I tell this story? Because this child was fearful of the "big boys," who had teased him, as his mother later learned. He was not ready to meet this. Maybe his mother was not yet ready to give him up.

A further word about mothers. Many are not ready for the separation that comes with school. Some may be eager to get the child out of the house, particularly when there are younger children at home, perhaps a new baby to claim her attention. Sometimes children know the mother wants to send them away, and they react with stubbornness and distress. Then there are mothers who cling, especially to the only child. It is this attitude that makes for school phobias, so called. The mother is always a feature in a school phobia.

There is also the indifferent mother, who takes no interest in the child's life at school. Though she sends her child dutifully, she is apart from the school; she does not ask at the end of the day what happened nor does she take an honest interest in the child's activities. I have seen many happy family gatherings where every child around the table had an opportunity to tell what transpired. These parents listen whether the tale is dull or exciting. Thus, every child can feel important.

I would like to mention another mother, seen of late more often than a few decades ago. She has what we call

the "Nobel Prize syndrome." She wants her child to be bigger and smarter than any other; she pushes promotion constantly, because she wants her child to become a Nobel Laureate. We can ask - "Does she want the prize for herself or for her child?"

Mothers are human; they have fantasies and feelings, and sometimes they need help to see how they want to use their children for their own aggrandisement. The mother has her own history, too. Maybe she hated school, and maybe it was hard for her to be separated from her mother. Every mother-child relationship tells its own story in the drama of "going to school."

DISCUSSION

Rex W. Speers, M.D.

Like Miss Ross, I, too, wish to contratulate the authors of this fine paper and for the same reason: It is full of facts. The title of the paper "Ready or Not, Here We Come" does seem to state accurately the situation both as regards the preschools and the first grade in private and public schools. Miss Ross spoke of the fact that in the preschool nursery programs one has to not only assess the child's readiness to enter school, but also whether or not the mother is ready to allow the child to leave her and go to school. It has seemed to me that the admissions committees of many preschool programs accept the child on the basis of the child's appeal to the staff members, or on the appeal the mother makes that the child be accepted. In many instances, the only criterion for "readiness" is the state of the child's toilet training.

Anna Freud's publications of the Assessment Profile and the Developmental Line Concept (A. Freud, 1965) has greatly broadened the possibilities for rendering an accurate opinion as to whether or not a child is ready to enter preschool. Margaret Mahler's publications (Mahler, 1952, 1955, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1968) on the separation-individuation process have permitted us to focus on a specific aspect of development which is essential to the assessment of whether or not a child is ready to separate from the mother and enter preschool.

Using Freud's developmental line concept and the understandings of the separation-individuation process as described by Margaret Mahler, the research team and staff at the Arsenal Family and Children's Center believed we ought to be able to assess children's readiness to enter the nursery school. In one research project (Speers, 1971) we used multiple observers of mother-child pairs at pre-admission visits. The observer focused on two mother-child pairs either in the play yard or in the classroom. During these one-hour visits (two in number, several weeks prior to the beginning of school), a teacher was available to children and mothers. The observers recorded the mother-child interactions, the child-teacher interactions and the child-child interactions; as well as the children's use of the play equipment and materials. From these observations we hoped to be able to assess the levels each child had achieved along the developmental lines and to assess the degree of libidinal object constancy* the child had obtained. We also hoped to assess the capacity each of the mothers exhibited in allowing her child to separate in this situation.

From these observational recordings we noted the child's play; his approach to mother whenever he needed her and his return to play; how many "watch me" -- "look at me" activities the child used to keep mother involved with him; how much he seemed to enjoy himself; his curiosity

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* As defined by Anna Freud (1965), "object constancy, which enables a positive inner image of the object (i.e., mother) to be maintained, irrespective of either satisfactions or dissatisfactions" (p. 65).

about the materials and toys; his degree of reluctance to use the teacher. If all of these observable bits of behavior were deemed adequate in the eyes of an experienced teacher, we recommended admission to the school.

When school began, ten days to three weeks later, we again set up our observational studies. From these we noted that in many instances it was as if we were seeing a different child. Some of these children cried, complained, pled to be taken home, refused to play, and clung to mother tenaciously. The experienced nursery school teacher seemed to know that this was part of "the way it is" and did not get upset about it. So, we maintained our belief that the child had, indeed, been "ready." However, when he actually entered the school, with an intellectual knowledge that separation from mother was imminent, normal regressive processes appeared and the child appeared to "re-do" earlier aspects of his developmental interactions with mother. Our consistent experiences with this pattern led us to assert that the presence of the mother in the nursery school is facilitating to the child's adjustment to the school. We repeatedly observed how our children used their mother during this period (and similarly how the mothers used the child) to effect separation and adaptation to the school. We are aware that there are children who go to nursery school and the mothers are not permitted, or not able, to attend those

first few days. We have wondered how the adaptation is made under such circumstances. We know that adaptation does occur, but "at what price?"

Our observational studies of these groups of children during their first few weeks of school revealed that the majority of the children proceeded through a regressive pattern for a few days and ultimately returned to the pre-admission level of maturity. These children, after approximately six weeks at school, could let mother leave without undo suffering, could play and participate in group activities, could use the teachers for comfort and support and were beginning to relate to other children. We believed the children recapitulated the separation-individuation processes experienced earlier in their development and that this recapitulation was desirable for a child's successful adaptation to school (Speers, et al). The term "successful" is used in the sense of adaptation being growth-promoting and facilitating without the child experiencing undue anxiety.

However, not all of the children traversed the steps we have come to recognize as the "normal." In fact, we found children who could be categorized into five variations from the normal. The first variation we labelled as "immature." These children exhibited continuing shadowing, clinging behavior to the mother for a prolonged period of time. In fact, some of these children did not exhibit the type of

behavior we had learned to associate with adequate libidinal object constancy (ability to tolerate mother's absence, ability to play, ability to form relationships with outside-the-family adults and other children) during their stay in the nursery school. Others seemed to attain this level of functioning at varying periods of time in the school. Some of these children are merely lagging in development and do catch up if given time and support; others are not simply "lagging" in their development and therefore represent true deviations or arrests in development.

A second category of variation we labeled as "pseudo-mature." These children entered the nursery school and acted as if they had no need for mother or for the teacher. They invariably told their mothers -- "Go home, I don't need you!" The girls of this group we called "little mothers." These girls presented themselves as if they were competent little mothers and proceeded to "mother" all the other children in the classroom. They were competent, efficient, and knew how to do most everything. Another group (or even some of the "little mothers") became the "good child" and were the eager helpers of the teachers. They stayed close to the teacher, always ready to help her and consistently revealed themselves to be a competent, efficient "child." The boys of this category were "little men" and behaved accordingly. They disdained the need for help from mother, teacher, or another child. They revealed to everyone their agility and

their competency at all tasks. Furthermore, they proclaimed themselves as group leaders who were unafraid of anything. Many of these children eventually allowed themselves to be a "little child" and to be appropriately taken care of, but a few maintained their stance of pseudo-maturity in spite of subsequent difficulties, such as the inability to use others for comfort and support.

Two other variations we believed to represent serious deviations and potentially severe pathology: One of these we called the "Run and Chase." As the name indicates, these are children who run headlong into dangerous situations; their behavior forces the adult to chase after them in an effort to protect them from harm. The other variation we labelled as "Pre-psychotic" and represented a grave deviation from the normal. A fuller explication of these variations can be found in Speers' paper of 1971.

Our follow-up studies of these children with the four variations revealed that most of the children developed within the broad range of normalcy. From our data, we learned that in the culture we studied, the children did not exhibit an observable degree of adequacy of libidinal object constancy in the school setting until approximately forty-two months of age. We deduced from our data that each child, on entering nursery school, recapitulated the separation-individuation process much as he had experienced it prior to entering

preschool. The various sub-phases of that process were exhibited in the first four-five days of school, and, in the normal child, the pre-admission level of libidinal object constancy was attained and the child and mother could separate without undue difficulty. Some of the variations required much longer and in the pre-psychotic group, libidinal object constancy was not attained. It is apparent from our data that there is nothing "magic" about age three as regards readiness for preschool anymore than there is "magic" about age six as regards entering regular school.

The term "libidinal object constancy" is a meta-psychological concept and not readily translated into observable behavior. It is apparent that a child's physical separation from the mother is not adequate evidence for the actuality of such constancy. From our data and experiences, we have suggested that certain play activities, verbalized fantasies and figure drawings, and recent recall on a review of the Rorschach cards, five to ten minutes after initial administration (by Dale C. Morter, Ph.D.), can be indicative of the degree of libidinal object constancy. For instance, in play we noted a sequence of play behavior indicative of increasing libidinal object constancy, i.e., "good baby" -- "good mother" play, followed by "bad baby" -- "bad mother" play. The typical situation is of the "good" baby in the carriage who dutifully drinks his milk and is then taken

care of by a "good" mother playmate. After considerable repetition of this type of play, the "good baby" player finally becomes "bad baby" who throws his bottle out of the carriage. The "good mother" repeatedly picks up the bottle and gives it to the baby, only to have "bad baby" throw the bottle out again. Finally, the "good mother" becomes exasperated and scolds the bad baby and prescribes harsh punishment for the "badness." After many repetitions of this theme in the carriage, it is transferred to other situations and repeatedly played out. We feel this type of play is indicative of increasingly stable libidinal object constancy, as the child demonstrates that he can tolerate the existence of "goodness" and "badness" in himself as well as in his mother.

For these few children capable of representational art, especially drawing of human figures, the state of separateness of mother and child may be graphically illustrated. Early in the adjustment period, we noted in some children's art that mother and child were depicted as joined in some manner. In subsequent drawings, there is gradual separation of the figures; this may be another indication of the state of libidinal object constancy.

We found some children quite capable of spontaneously verbalizing their awareness of separation. Initially, the child might state that mother is home. He later adds that

she is home cooking lunch for him (or her). Later, he may be able to admit that mother is at home taking care of little brother or sister. When asked if mother is thinking of him (or her), some children initially would tear up and be unable to respond, but later could state that she is busy with brother or sister (usually said in a somewhat angry way). The child's awarcness of the mother who takes care of him when they are together or who is taking care of him even though not together is not evidence of adequate libidinal object constancy. A child's awareness that the mother takes care of him most of the time, either when together or when apart, but that there are times when she doesn't fulfill all his needs, is indicative of a quite stable state of libidinal object constancy.

Dr. Dale C. Morter and I have used observational data and compared it with the child's ability to recall his initial responses to Rorschach cards when re-presented to him five to ten minutes after an initial presentation. In those children with adequate libidinal object constancy, recall is high. In those with a lesser degree of constancy, the recall is low (less than 20% in many instances). We have also deduced that the degree of "self" constancy is apparent from the number of non-animate figures seen in the Rorschach blot. The presence of number of machines, inanimate objects, lifeless objects, etc., may well be indicative of a poor sense of self constancy.

In a second stage of our research project, we attempted to correlate the normal children and those who varied from the normal, with play ability. We developed a play quotient using types of play and quality of the play and correlated each child's "P.Q." with his recapitulated separation-individuation process. We consistently found that the children who were "normal" in this recapitulation were "good" players, whereas the children who exhibited variations of the recapitulated process showed themselves to be "poorer" or "less good" players. Children of the "run and chase" and prepsychotic variations did not develop the ability to do socio-dramatic play. Although children from the other variations often became able to play socio-dramatically, they were slower in reaching that level of play and some did not attain the quality of play levels reached by the "normals."

The title of the paper today was "Ready or Not, Here We Come." I hope not -- I hope we will recognize that not all children are ready for school at three years of age; not all mothers are psychologically ready to allow their child to go to school at three; and, not all schools are capable of coping with very many children (and mothers) who are not ready for school. I would wish for our teachers to recognize that their school system may be incapable of coping with several "unready" children; that some children

need another year or so at home with mother. I would hope that our teachers would recognize they are not omnipotent and cannot handle everything nor can they meet every child's needs. With the "ready" child, the system and the teacher can absorb them well and provide a growth promoting experience for such children. The "not ready" child (and/or mother) will overtax the system, the teacher, and the other children. This may be a detrimental experience not only for that child but even for the "normal" children, because of the overtaxed teacher and system. Can we reduce our fantasies of omnipotence sufficiently to say, "If not ready, don't come?"

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